If I saw you every day forever...

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If I saw you every day forever...

by AGlassRoseNeverFades

Summary

Hannibal finally masters the art of time travel and decides to give himself and Will the life they deserve together. He just has to be patient and let Will grow up first.

From afar, of course.

Notes

Because Body and Blood wasn't already depraved enough I guess 🤷

Teacups, Time, and the Rules of Disorder

It is six and a half years after Will Graham's death—years spent eating to survive instead of for pleasure as he works into the early hours of each morning hunched over a desk while operas he never attends anymore play from a stereo in the background—that Hannibal finally unlocks the secret of time travel.

Long ago, he had often thought he would return to the time of Mischa's death once he unraveled it, but upon recognizing that he would have to return as his younger self, he altered this plan. He could not expect even a clever, adult-minded ten-year-old boy to be capable of slaughtering five grown men on his own and would have to temper his plans more realistically.

The loss of Mischa is no more than a dulled memory by this point in his life while the loss of Will continues to cut fresh and deep, so truthfully, it is an easier choice than he would have expected. He wants back the time he lost with Will. He wants *all* the time he can possibly get with his beloved. It is with this in mind that Hannibal adjusts his calculations accordingly.

He blinks to awareness in Paris in midsummer, walks downstairs to attend breakfast with his aunt and fellow ward, and politely informs them that he intends to seek emancipation, will be taking charge of his inheritance from his uncle and parents—barring whatever Murasaki needs for her own and Chiyoh's comfort of course—and hopes to have all the paperwork in order for emigration to America by the end of the week. Chiyoh pauses briefly before taking another bite of toast, accustomed to the other orphan's strangeness and not easily disarmed by it. Murasaki sets her own fork down beside her plate.

"What has changed, Hannibal?" she asks. He recalls that only days prior to this meal, he had cut off the offensive head of a racist, misogynistic butcher and presented it to her as a gift. He had not understood then as he does now that she fears him.

"I have gained clarity on my purpose and intentions in this life and wish to begin pursuing them as quickly as possible," he explains to her with a smile.

There is no attempt to stop him from his plans, and money goes far to grease the wheels of bureaucracy that would normally balk at the concept of a sixteen-year-old not only declaring emancipation with no stated cause but also emigration. He is certain if he finds himself in any difficulties due to his legal age beyond this point that Lady Murasaki will be more than happy to help him even from overseas. She is fond of him still, and also glad to see him gone as swiftly as possible.

Before he leaves, he pays a visit to each of the men who killed his sister and deals with them swiftly and quietly, no theatrics or playing with his food this time, no game to dangle before a more innocent Chiyoh of choosing the role of either murder accomplice or prison warden for the ringleader of their little group. He is on a schedule after all, and if he deserves a second chance at a better life, then so do those who remain of his family.

Nine days later, he has a temporary apartment set up in Nashville and a new car under an assumed name. He chose this particular city under the guise of being a foreign tourist mildly fascinated with the music and culture synonymous with this region, truthfully only here because of its proximity to the various states Will had mentioned growing up in, close but not *too* close as a precaution to where he suspects Will might be at this point in his history.

He starts his search in the area Will was born, according to the birth certificate he glimpsed and memorized when poking around in Will's house to plant evidence a lifetime ago, hoping that if the Grahams' nomadic lifestyle has already begun, he will at least get lucky enough to find a clue indicating where they might be at present. He gets luckier even than that, spotting Graham Sr working at the docks in Shreveport, remembering him from a picture he had also memorized of the man at a much older age but still quite recognizable, just a touch greyer and more grizzled than the man before him now.

He follows Graham home from a distance, surprised to see his weatherworn pickup truck pull up next to a Pontiac convertible in the driveway. He parks his own car out of view and hides somewhere he can peer into the windows of the house unobserved through the binoculars he brought. There is a woman smoking by an open window, vibrant cherry-red dyed hair the same shade as her vehicle parked out front. This must be Will's mother then, not yet struck out on her own for brighter prospects.

He does not see Will and assumes at this hour, given his tender age, that it must be past bedtime for the boy already. He is nonetheless displeased to see that a few short minutes after Graham shuffles tiredly in through the front door, he and his wife get into an argument that appears to be quite loud from their animated gesturing. No small wonder the marriage doesn't last, and how much better Will's lonely childhood with a single father now seems by comparison to this far less ideal alternative. He wonders not for the first time if Will was truly too young to remember his mother after she left or if the memory was something he intentionally blocked out.

He is here only to observe until Will is old enough to approach, or at least that is his intention for now. He tells himself this though he has always been dreadful at self-delusion.

Mr. and Mrs. Graham spend at most two or three evenings per week at home and otherwise alternate nights spent out carousing at the local watering holes, an arrangement clearly borne of shared love for alcoholism and revelry that brought them together in the first place, but which they no longer enjoy together due to the practical consideration of being unable to afford a babysitter. A perfectly fine arrangement if not for the stewing resentment each holds for the other on nights when it is their turn to stay home nursing both a toddler on the cusp of kindergarten and a hangover on the cusp of migraine from the previous night's partying. And yet on the rare nights they can hire a sitter and go out together, they are noticeably more amorous and often remain quite glued to each other's side.

He is having trouble seeing in Mr. Graham the stoic, often somber and worn down individual Will once described in a moment of hushed honesty and can only conclude that despite their constant bickering, Graham truly loves his wife and would become quite the changed man in her absence. A sad-eyed, bereft lover and marginally better father only by happenstance of losing himself in his work almost as much as his drinking later in life, providing Will roof

and shelter and benign neglect to grow into his own man on his own terms despite his unfortunate circumstances.

Hannibal decides to alter his plans slightly one evening as he cooks dinner over a hotplate in a rent-by-the-week motel room in Shreveport. Instead of waiting a few years to approach Will on his own, he will ingratiate himself to the Grahams under his current identity, a twenty-year-old German ex-pat and dog walker named Günter Handel, and hope to eventually ease any xenophobic or gender-stereotyped fears they may have of bringing their young child around him.

He discovers to no great surprise that when softened by the familiarity of a crowded, rowdy barroom and a few stiff drinks interspersed between several pitchers of Coors Light, Mr. and Mrs. Graham are both quite charming and easily charmed, pliable, fond, and adept at quickly forging new friendships rarely remembered except fuzzily by morning. It is easy to picture the early, sweet days of their courtship like this. His strong build and unrecognized accent are not deterrents from invitation to join in impromptu drunken singing or slurred mention of a state fair coming to town which apparently he *must* attend to order a basket of something called Fried Snickers for the true American experience. He agrees only on the following night when Mr. Graham mumbles something into his half-empty glass about "taking Billy to see the animals at the petting zoo."

He has not allowed himself more than a brief distant glimpse of the boy up to now. Knowing that this Will won't recognize him and cannot even tie his own shoelaces yet has not lessened his eagerness or trepidation. A month after his check-in at the Lucky Clover Extended Stay Motel and Suites, he is close enough to smell the tear-free baby shampoo in the boy's soft ringlets and sticky sweet stain of cotton candy on his fingertips. He is a bit short for his age right now and unreasonably adorable.

Bill Graham's worker's tan is more obvious in the bright sunlight, as are the dark roots of his wife Jocelyn's dyed hair, Hannibal notices because it would be unseemly and unnerving for the young parents if he were to look at their son for too long and with too much interest. Still, he is privately enraptured by the wide innocence of those familiar seafoam eyes which predictably refuse to connect with his own and the recognizable but smaller proportioned face softened by dimples and baby fat. Here is the love of his life, tiny and delicate-boned as a baby bird, with a short and slim column of a throat he could crush within a single fist if he were so inclined.

He is knelt, uncaring of the dirt on the knees of his jeans, part of his "average, impoverished young immigrant" disguise. "Hello, little William," he says because calling him Will may seem like a curious slight to parents who have nicknamed him Billy, after his father. "I am Handel. It's lovely to meet you." He has told Bill and Jocelyn that he goes by his surname because he dislikes his "Christian" name, and made a quaint-sounding joke about being mistaken for a descendant of the composer. It is truthfully because a small child's imperfect attempt to say the name might sound close enough to an attempt at the name "Hannibal" instead to make the lie to his beloved weigh less on his sensibilities.

"He's shy," Will's mother says apologetically when the boy starts to sway on his feet without looking at him or responding. She places a hand on Will's shoulder to stop his swaying.

Hannibal thinks about removing the hand from her wrist.

“Glad you could make it, Han,” says Will’s father, shortening his name down by yet another syllable. “You tried them snickers yet?” Hannibal makes a face which Bill and Jocelyn both chuckle at in pleasantly teasing good humor. The four-year-old laughs because they laugh, and Hannibal forcibly keeps his hands on his bent thighs still.

“You’ll like the crawfish boil better,” Bill promises, leading the way toward the part of the fairgrounds which smells most strongly of seafood and spice.

It is remarkable that even while sober—although both Graham adults carry in one free hand a plastic cup of stale warm beer—they trust him so freely, though both are a curious blend of relaxed and nervous in his company, and certainly present a happier image of their little family than he knows is perfectly accurate while in public. He learns as the four of them sit at a sticky, graffitied picnic table to dine on shellfish together, the Grahams with refreshed beers and he and Will with Cokes which only one of them enjoys, that neither of them are from Shreveport originally, and that of the few friends they have made at the bars only Hannibal has ever shown interest in spending time with them outside of that particular setting. Their shared loneliness coalesces in his mind to form a more complete picture of the Grahams and lead him to wonder if it is even possible Jocelyn Graham would choose to stay in a timeline in which she and her husband have someone other than each other to confide in. It is a tempting prospect to consider. He likes them both terribly.

The four of them spend the entire day together. Bill takes his son on a carousel ride while Hannibal and Jocelyn chat amiably on the other side of the fence. Later, Jocelyn quickly snatches the boy up as he attempts to run off, giggling and eager to give chase along with the animal handlers when a baby goat escapes the petting zoo pen. Bill chortles heartily at the scene and Hannibal laughs along with him, eyes wandering back to the now malcontent child fussing in his mother’s arms, and dares offer to hold him when the woman’s face pinches, exasperated and moderately stressed. She declines but smiles sincerely at the offer, shifting Will in her grip from one hip to the other. They are beautiful like this, the Graham family.

Will warms to his presence more as the day goes on, glancing up at him shyly now and again while Hannibal pretends not to notice so he’ll grow bolder and more comfortable looking, but still does not speak, which both parents assure him is normal. “He’s a quiet one,” Bill says.

“For his age,” Jocelyn tacks on, looking distant for a moment. The boy is holding her hand now, attention focused on his own little feet as he toddles alongside her.

“Not an annoying miles-per-minute chatterbox like some of his peers,” Bill responds firmly, smile a little too wide now. Echoes of an argument they’ve had before.

Hannibal knows from reviewing Will’s medical files that he won’t receive a diagnosis that places him on the autism spectrum until his early twenties, shortly after his discharge from the New Orleans police force. By the eighties, the signs are becoming more easily recognized in children around his age, but rates of diagnosis are not on the rise to quite the same rapid degree that they will be in later decades. A poorer family such as theirs will likely never even consider taking him to see a specialist unless he starts to exhibit “problem behaviors,”

perhaps even then with reluctance because of concerns about counselors delving too deeply into their private affairs in search of patterns of abuse or neglect.

Will also sometimes squints at distances in a way that suggests he should already be wearing glasses for his near-sightedness, but his mother and father either haven't noticed yet or will wait until he starts to complain of headaches before bothering with an optometrist. Were pride not a concern for them and he not in the role of a young man who possesses none of his own wealth, to put them more at ease in his company, Hannibal would have already offered to buy Will's first pair of spectacles himself.

What he can offer them is a ride home at sundown, with a promise to drive Bill back to pick up their car from the festival lot in the morning. They demur at first, but this is also the era when public campaigns against drunk driving are just starting to pick up in the U.S. and they do not wish to lose his good opinion of them by appearing to be irresponsible parents, so they have no choice but to give in once he points out that he is the only adult between the three of them who has not touched a drop of liquor during today's outing. They both look to him with confused embarrassment when he asks if they have a car seat for Will to transfer over to his vehicle first. He had forgotten child safety laws in this country are still appalling at this time as well.

Jocelyn sits in the front with him while Will sits in Bill's lap in the backseat, the older man shooting Hannibal a wry patronizing smile when he insists on the man at least pulling on his seatbelt over them both before starting the ignition. "Sure you don't have young 'uns of your own yet?" Jocelyn teases, sharing an ill-disguised side glance with her husband. Hannibal engages them in small talk during the drive to dispel some of the awkwardness and makes sure to wait until he is directed where to go at each turn before changing lanes and flipping the switch for the signal lights.

The boy naps against his father's chest, adorably rumpled and grumpy when they get out of the car in the Grahams' driveway. He refuses to stay put when Bill sets him on the couch and asks Hannibal if he'll stay to join them for a bowl of Hamburger Helper for dinner. Hannibal accepts.

While Bill Graham gets started on making cheeseburger macaroni in the kitchen and Jocelyn Graham heads to the bathroom to freshen up, Hannibal follows the boy into his own room. Still frowning and wiping the sleep from his eyes, Hannibal thinks with amusement that this is the most Will has reminded him of his future self.

Will looks up at him, tiredness making him more comfortable doing so openly, frown turning more thoughtful as he comes to an important decision. He reaches into the small toy chest at the foot of his bed and brings out a pair of plastic dinosaurs, a triceratops and a Tyrannosaurus rex. He hands Hannibal the T-rex. Hannibal accepts with all the grace befitting such an honor and sits on the floor to play with him.

Will stares intently at the toy in his own hand, walking it intently across the carpet in continued silence, so Hannibal does the same. He used to make noises out of his mouth for Mischa when they played with her stuffed animals. She was much louder and rowdier than Will at this age. She did not live past this age. He is surprised by how little thinking of her hurts now.

Will now turns the triceratops to face the T-rex and wiggles it in his hand in a movement that seems to mime talking. Hannibal waits until he is done to make the same motion with the toy in his own hand, then tilts it as though waiting expectantly for the answer to a question. The triceratops "talks" a bit more animatedly now than the first time, and so the back and forth continues for a few minutes. Will's eyes dart to Hannibal's shoulder and he smiles. Hannibal's chest aches.

"I can't believe he's letting you play with him," Jocelyn says from the open doorway in mild astonishment. "He mean mugs other kids at the playground til they leave him alone, won't even let *us* join him half the time without scowling like we've done something wrong and then ignores us." Hannibal suspects the problem might be that they make unsolicited noises to engage his attention or poor narrative choices which clash with the plot of Will's own design. He doesn't say as much to her. As much as he is able, he has tried to avoid speaking *about* Will in front of him, knowing that he is certain to dislike it as much at four as at thirty-four.

Instead he says, "I much preferred my own company when I was younger too." Will has gone back to walking his dinosaur along the carpet since his mother's interruption. He scoots a bit closer than before, however, and the toy occasionally makes passes closer to his knee. Hannibal allows his T-rex a similarly wider sphere of space to roam.

He politely pretends to enjoy the cheeseburger macaroni when they eat dinner and accepts the can of beer Bill passes to him, though he only takes small sips. He believes his welcome may be wearing a bit thin as the night goes on but the couple are too polite to say so, and despite knowing it would be unwise to make a nuisance of himself, he is reluctant to leave now and put miles between himself and the boy being tucked into bed all too soon later. He knows that he must.

He offers to take care of the dishes whilst they prepare to wind down for the evening. He turns the water off a few minutes after they leave the room and creeps down the hall where he can hear their voices in their own bedroom. From the words he can make out, he surmises they are arguing about whether to invite him to stay for the night but cannot tell who is advocating for which side of the debate.

"Goddammit, Josie—" Jocelyn steps out of the room, shutting the door harder than necessary though not quite in a slam, and startles when she sees him standing there. He steps aside to allow her to pass, gaze darting to Will's door. Her lips purse and shoulders straighten, puffed up after the argument and unwilling to allow any perceived judgment to stand in her current mood, regardless of whichever side she was arguing for.

"He's fine, don't worry about it. I'm sorry you heard any of that though."

"The walls are thin," he points out. Her expression pinches in further.

"He's *fine.* He's sleeping." She marches past him to the living room.

He follows, a few steps behind, as she reenters the kitchen and starts wiping down the counters. He considers the choices before him. The logistics and possible complications—that he has been seen with the family today and at the bar previously and may be remembered

by someone who could provide a description, that his car can be seen now in the driveway, the fact that he must still check out of the hotel and pack up his belongings. It is dark out and unlikely anyone will make out the license plate or even the color of his vehicle if they notice it at all. It is also a different car than the one he drove from Tennessee in, which is registered under yet a different name as an added layer of separation between Günter Handel and Hannibal Lecter. Eyewitness accounts are notoriously spotty, especially when the majority of potential witnesses are strangers and drunks. He has a go bag in the trunk, as always, and few items in the room, none of which are tied to him personally or would incriminate Günter Handel in any crime. The room has also been paid for in cash for the next two months already.

He is glad of his habit of touching as little as possible with bare hands in others' homes and even hotel rooms, when they are registered under a false identity. As absurd as the precaution may seem, he even wears gloves and a shower cap to bed in the room at the Lucky Clover and wipes down everything he touches after each use, even the items he brought there with him. Here, he need only finish washing the dishes, the beer can already emptied down the sink and crumpled flat to fit inside his jeans pocket.

He dons gloves and uncaps the scalpel kept on his person at all times.

After seeing to Mrs. Graham, he finds Mr. Graham splashing cold water on his alcohol-flushed face in the master bedroom. The man glances up and sees him in the mirror above the sink, too late to react. There is no noise made which could wake a sleeping child. The house is quiet and still.

He carries them both to bed, twining their limbs together in a final loving embrace, and mops the blood not to hide evidence, as there is no disguising what has happened here, but simply to tidy up a bit as courtesy.

Afterward, he opens the door to Will's bedroom and removes his gloves, knowing he will simply have to be careful about what he touches in this room. The light switch is nudged upward with a flannel-sleeved elbow.

"Will," he says softly, kneeling by the boy's bedside, possibly the first to ever call him by this name. He says it again and touches a pajama-clad shoulder gently. The angel blinks awake slowly and makes confused, fussy noises as he sits up.

Hannibal gives him the juice pouch he brought in—full of entirely too much processed sugar, but best to keep him at ease with familiar comforts until they are far away from here. He waits until the child takes a few sips and appears more alert before speaking again. "Will, I would like to ask you something." How abominable is he ready to be tonight to ensure their future happiness later? "Do you think your mother and father are happy?"

The way his boy's face crumples is difficult to watch but it tells him all that he needs to know. "Does it make you feel bad that you can't make them happier, darling?" He pauses, then takes the dreadful, icy plunge. "That it even sometimes makes them sadder or madder that they had a baby when they were so happy together before?"

Will sniffles, takes another drink of his juice. Nods. Hannibal Lecter, killer and eater of dozens upon dozens of men and women in a lifetime forgotten by all but himself, for the first time in his unnatural life feels monstrous.

“It’s not fair, is it? You didn’t ask for this life.” He places a delicate hand on the boy’s tear-stained cheek. “Being with you makes *me* supremely happy, however. In fact, nothing in the world would ever make me happier than if you came to live with me instead. Clever little thing, I bet if you were to look me in the eye right now, you could see that I’m telling the truth, couldn’t you?”

The boy blinks at his chin once. Twice. Then lifts his eyes to meet Hannibal’s, and Hannibal peels back most of the layers of his person suit to allow the child to see and absorb the love and awe and sincerity there. Those beautiful eyes widen and the boy gasps, face flickering between smiling and wrinkling to cry more, a complicated expression which shouldn’t grace such young features and reaffirms his own resolve to remove the Grahams’ further influence on his beloved’s upbringing.

“H-h-” The boy hiccups around more tears. Hannibal takes a plain white handkerchief out of his shirt pocket and dabs his face with it until the boy eventually calms enough to stop crying. “Handel,” he hears from the sweet enchanting voice for the first time, far too correctly for his liking.

“My name is Hannibal actually,” he confesses, adding a conspiratorial wink. “I just didn’t want to correct how they both pronounced it.” As hoped, Will huffs a little laugh behind closed, smiling lips. He is looking down and away from Hannibal’s eyes once more, far less smooth and subtle about the avoidance than he will be when he gets older, but Hannibal doesn’t mind. His smiles and laughter are more than victory enough.

“Hann-i-bal.” Hannibal’s heart thuds in his chest. “Are you here to take me away?”

“Yes, I am, Will.” The boy scrunches his nose confusedly, perhaps just noticing his rechristening. He can’t bring himself to call Will something as unsuited to him as ‘Billy.’ “And if we’re very quiet, we can go now without waking anyone else up. Will you do something for me, little one?” He stands briefly to pick up a small colorful backpack hanging on the wall and brings it back to him. “Will you pick out some of your favorite toys and pack them for me? Just a few that can fit into this bag. I’ll buy you many, many more to replace the rest when we get home if you’re good. Can you do that for me?”

Will bites his bottom lip and nods. The first toy to go in is a small stuffed beagle on his bed. Hannibal smiles at this unsurprising consistency to Will’s tastes and turns to the closet to pick an outfit for Will to change into while the child is focused almost solemnly on his own task. The triceratops and T-rex also make it into the bag, he is pleased to note when he turns back. There is still enough room inside when Will is done making his selections for another outfit and the pajamas he is wearing. Hannibal helps him change, tying the final knot on his little shoes with a satisfied smile.

“Do you know where the house keys are so we can lock up on the way out?” The charming little creature nods and obediently leads him to the coin tray he already noticed on the short bookshelf by the door. “After you, then.”

Will seems surprised by the big responsibility left to his small hands, a little excited but careful with his entrusted task. He opens the door, closes it behind them outside, and locks it all by himself, taking a few tries to get the key to turn right.

“You handled that wonderfully like a big boy, Will,” he tells him proudly. The boy beams under the praise. “Now you can put them in that flower pot to be picked up later.” Will has spared him the awkwardness of using his tear-stained handkerchief to touch the doorknob himself, as he had to do when he opened the closet and dresser drawers when Will was distracted to avoid getting odd looks from him.

He opens his arms now in silent gesture for Will to come to him. His smart boy is so in sync with what he wants, lifting his own arms to be picked up when they are standing toe to toe. He knows they cannot delay but still takes a moment once he is holding the boy at last to close his eyes and breathe deep the scent of the day’s sweat and nearly faded baby shampoo.

He carries Will to the car and buckles him into the backseat, unzipping the backpack to take out the stuffed dog and hand it to him. He will have to purchase a car seat once they are a sufficient distance away from Shreveport. For now, he simply drives extra carefully with a close eye to the traffic except for occasional glimpses to the rearview mirror, readjusted so he can watch tiny Will Graham nod off, blinking himself back to awareness several times before the arms clutching his toy go lax around it and he finally falls back to sleep.

Home Again, Home Again, Jiggety-Jig

Chapter Notes

> *rolls in on skates a few days later than planned with Starbucks in hand* Hey, I can post whenever I want, that's the magic of time travel, bay-bee! 💖

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The greatest risk to them at this time is that a neighbor may have seen him and his car at the Graham household, and it is for this reason he is determined not to let Will and himself be seen in public together until they have at least changed vehicles. It therefore poses a slight problem when Will wakes with thirty minutes to spare until they reach the facility where he stored the white Ferrari with its Tennessee license plates registered to a Karl Sandoval—a deliberately ostentatious choice which is a far cry from Handel's modest blue hatchback as well as the darker tasteful models he prefers when buying a car under his own name, which he has not done yet since his arrival and will instead be taking Will home to his Nashville apartment by taxi after storing the Ferrari yet again.

"Darling, do you need the bathroom?" he asks as the boy starts to fuss, bouncing his small legs in a restless motion.

"Uh-huhhhh," the child whines.

"Can you hold it for at least a few more minutes?" The only answer to this is another plaintive sound and a frantic, ragdolling shake of the boy's head. Softly, Hannibal sighs. "Then can you go standing up, like big boys do?" A nod this time. Well, at least he hasn't seen another car in several miles. Hannibal pulls off onto the shoulder and parks, quicly getting Will out and carrying him to the other side of the tree line. His tiny fingers are too tired and fumbling to unclasp his fly, so Hannibal does this for him and does it up again as well after the boy is finished.

"You go too." Hannibal huffs a small laugh under his breath.

"Sage advice, I suppose. We still have many miles to go on this trip. Would you mind turning around and watching the car for me please?" After relieving himself as well, he opens the package of wet naps he brought to wipe Will's hands and his own, humming a tune as he carefully cleans between Will's fingers and just under his nails to distract him from getting bored and fussy again.

Will wants to walk back instead of being carried again, little lemon-scented hand in bigger lemon-scented hand, which takes a bit longer in the dark. Hannibal buckles him in and hands him his beagle again, laying a soft kiss on Will's forehead before returning to his own seat and restarting the engine.

Half an hour later, he pulls into the storage garage beside the Ferrari and turns off the ignition. As soon as the headlights shut off, Will starts to cry. A rather unexpected reaction when he seemed just fine in the dark earlier, but he supposes this would be a different, scarier sort of dark inside an unlit container even with the garage door still open.

He leaves the passenger door open after unbuckling Will again so the interior light will stay on and spends the next several minutes soothing the boy, sitting to hold him in his lap and rock him while rubbing his back, and reassures him he won't turn it off until they leave again. When Will's sniffles are sufficiently dried up, he gets to work switching out the hatchback's license plates for a different set unconnected to the identity of Günter Handel and transfers everything else inside to the Ferrari.

The hatchback's door remains ajar even once he has Will buckled into the other car and pulls it forward just out of reach of the garage's open maw, an ache of nostalgia in his chest when he looks into the rearview mirror and watches Will watch the abandoned car, all lit up like a little dinghy boat in a miniature sea of dark.

He leaves the hatchback's keys under the driver side visor and locks up the garage again. Only a few more hours now until they reach the Tennessee border.

They enter Nashville around a quarter past six in the morning. Will is asleep again when he pulls into the second storage garage. He's careful not to wake the boy again just yet as he straps the cartoonishly small backpack on over his own shoulders and tosses their remaining trash in a nearby dumpster, then gently lifts Will up and carries him to a diner two blocks away.

While the early morning rush of traffic outside failed to garner so much as a twitch from the little lamb in his arms, the low tones of a jukebox against the wall succeed in finally rousing him. "Aww, you need a booster seat for the little one?" a waitress asks.

"Please." He promises himself this will be the last time he subjects himself and Will to greasy American fare as she seats them both at a nearby booth. It has been a long drive after a long day beforehand and he is too tired to consider cooking once they get to the apartment, but his little one needs a hot breakfast. He orders only eggs on toast and coffee for himself and silver dollar pancakes with strawberries and a cup of hot chocolate for Will. The toast is soggy and the eggs are rubbery, but the boy is easily pleased by his own meal. Hannibal keeps the beagle toy in his own lap so Will doesn't spill anything on it. The coffee is also surprisingly decent enough to not be a hardship to accept refills for when the waitress returns to check up on them.

"Big bro and little bro gonna paint the town red together this morning?" she teases.

"My son actually," he corrects, having come to a decision on how to present the two of them together during the drive.

"No joke! You look so young to be a dad already, sweetheart."

"Young in body but old at heart," he assures her with a wink. She laughs and pours him another refill, completely taken in by his self-assured charm.

When Will is more than halfway through his breakfast and slowing down on eating, Hannibal calls for a taxi at the payphone behind them. After a twenty minute wait, in which he orders a second hot chocolate to go in hopes that the ensuing sugar crash will put Will back to sleep long enough for him to catch a short nap as well, their cab arrives to finally bring them home.

Will hugs the stuffed puppy close to his chest and looks around the sparsely decorated apartment, curious and far too alert still for his liking. Hannibal takes a loaf of marbled rye out of the freezer to thaw. If he is to stay awake for a few more hours until Will is ready for a nap, he can at least make himself some better toast.

“This is a temporary arrangement until we buy a house,” he tells Will conversationally. “I haven’t spent much time here in any case so there hasn’t been much decorating yet.” He has no reason to keep them in Tennessee longer than the few weeks it should take to set up a more permanent home elsewhere and forge documentation to cement Will’s ties to him. He will declare Will his stepson via marriage to a fictional Anglo-French woman (which also provides convenient and excellent cover if he is ever asked why he sought emancipation as a minor) and a certificate of death for the same woman. A very young widower with a small child is likely to generate a great deal of gossip wherever he goes, but they will stay out of high society and keep to themselves at least until he is a legal adult again and Will is old enough to reliably corroborate their backstory when asked.

Will thankfully begins to rub his eyes tiredly again at almost nine, and with a few excessive staged yawns Hannibal is able to coax the same from him and wear him down enough with playtime to join him for bed. Will does not seem to agree with this logic however, as after he changes into his own pajamas, he must lightly tussle with the increasingly bitter and contrarian youngster to get Will into his again. This, combined with the overwhelm of so many new environments in the past several hours and a major life change to go with them, leads to the third time in approximately twelve hours he has made his beloved cry, a woeful new record for them and possibly poor representation of himself to the boy in this life. This time there are bigger gasping sobs, tiny clenched fists, kicking as he is picked up and held again, and distressed incoherent yelling which makes Hannibal grateful he always chooses his residences with wall thickness and soundproofing in mind.

“It seems I am to be the villain in your life no matter what I try, love,” he sighs in Italian. He bounces the child in his arms and rubs his back, ignoring the heels still digging and kicking into his sides with surprising force as he murmurs soft reassurances in English. Tears prickle at the corners of his own eyes as empathy and exhaustion creep in, but if it takes another hour to make the child settle down then so be it. He deserves to vent all of his stress and frustration on the man who caused it.

His words of comfort slowly devolve into more wordless humming until finally, *finally* the boy calms and doesn’t fight it when Hannibal uses another handkerchief to wipe up the snot dripping from his nose. He lazily uses the same cloth to mop up mucus gathered around his neck and shirt collar too instead of changing into another one, then drops the used cloth on the nightstand to be washed later and falls back tiredly onto the bed without bothering to pull back the covers, a much sleepier and worn out Will still in his arms. The child starts to snore softly against his chest within minutes, mouth agape due to his stuffy nose and fingers curled

into the fabric of Hannibal's pajama top. Hannibal thinks it the most wonderful lullaby he has ever heard as he pets the boy's curls and drifts off as well to the sweet sound.

He wakes after only three short hours of rest but feels refreshed enough to face the rest of the afternoon. He takes his time getting up anyway, savoring the quiet susurrus of Will's steady breathing now that his sinuses have cleared up. He has climbed off of Hannibal at some point to curl around the stuffed dog Hannibal placed on the opposite pillow, a line of drool puddling damp into the pillow and the poor mutt's flipped up ear. Hannibal is turned toward him, arm heavily draped over a small waist in evidence that even while asleep, he will not allow the boy to stray far out of reach. A sleepy smile steals over his face as he decides to watch his perfect angel in repose for a few minutes longer.

The boy snuffles, absently wipes his damp face with his hand, and sits up bleary-eyed and foggy half an hour later, Hannibal's hand slipping from his waist to curl around his ankle instead and gently rub with his thumb as he continues to watch him. "Feeling better, little lamb?" he asks, accent deeper and more pronounced after his meditative rest.

The boy in answer reaches for Hannibal, who sits up to scoop him into his arms again, heart swelling with love and contentment. There is no price too big on heaven or earth to pay for having his Will all to himself like this, for the rest of their lives if he has anything to say about it. He may have been hasty and rash in his decision to steal the boy away instead of allowing his childhood to run its previous natural course, but he does not regret it. How can he with sleep-warmed perfection a mere hug away?

"Han'bal, 're you gon' be m'daddy now?" his little one slurs. Hannibal's arms tighten around him minutely and he smiles into the kiss planted at Will's wispy hairline.

"Always and forever, darling," he promises. "Every day for the rest of our days, I'm all yours."

Chapter End Notes

Hannibal: I may have been a bit hasty.

Hannibal: **refuses to acknowledge that HE COULD HAVE TRAVELED BACK TO A LATER TIME OR JUST WAITED TO MEET WILL or how eerily well-planned this entire "impulsive" decision has been all along* Acting like him getting to raise Will all by himself now is just an Oops, All Berries, "Well, this might as well happen I guess" kind of situation* 🤷

The Chrysalis

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It's apparent after only a few weeks of living together that while Will is not unaccustomed to love and attention at this age, he is unused to a guardian's full undivided focus being solely upon him. He seems not to know how to deal with Hannibal's constant presence, even if Hannibal makes a concerted effort to busy himself with something else like a book or a composition he's working on.

He is ever ready to drop what's he's doing at the slightest hint of fuss or boredom from the little one on the other side of the room, but he does not insert himself into playtime without invitation, and invitations are infrequent at this stage. Perhaps they always will be, but he knows better than to try to predict his beloved's whims.

Even if Will doesn't often engage him in play directly, he always looks up to make sure Daddy is still watching him. Hannibal always is, even if he sometimes pretends otherwise.

After some deliberation, Hannibal decides to hold off on moving them out of Tennessee just yet until Will is old enough to weigh in with an opinion of his own about their living arrangements. This is partly to avoid overwhelming the boy with yet another long trip so soon after the first, partly because he knows little about the suitability of other major population centers throughout the rest of the country outside of Baltimore in this decade, and he is reluctant to relocate them back to an area littered with old haunts, old memories, and old faces they may meet yet again if they return there. He would choose not to tempt fate by introducing Will to the likes of Jack Crawford or Alana Bloom a second time if he can potentially avoid it.

This may leave certain promises unfulfilled, promises unmade by the backwards flow of time which he would nonetheless have liked to keep, but responsible fatherhood must take priority over personal vengeance. He will limit the possibility of pernicious influences on his son's malleable young mind to the best of his ability. He is not even certain yet whether it would be wise to send Will to school once he is of age.

He purchases a home for them about an hour away from the bustle of Nashville, a grey brick house with an appealing multi-faceted front façade and a subtle half-turret which will make a perfect breakfast nook directly next to the open plan kitchen. He usually prefers a house that more distinctly separates living room, dining room, and kitchen, the better to encourage his guests to subconsciously recognize the graduating hierarchy of privilege in being invited into them—there had been a fair few who never once stepped over the threshold into his kitchen in Baltimore, and even some invited inside for coffee and tea in the den who never got to sit at his table—but he has no intention of regularly entertaining guests for at least these first few delicate years.

An open floor plan is more suitable for keeping one eye on the stove while the other is making sure tiny feet on the living room carpet don't wander off alone outside or up and

down the stairs willy nilly whilst at play. Still, as an essential precaution he installs baby gates at the tops and bottoms of every staircase, proper sturdy ones drilled into wood and plaster rather than flimsy plastics.

There is no basement, but there is a storm cellar under the backyard shed which the previous owners had expanded into an emergency shelter complete with air conditioning, heating, electricity, plumbing and minimalist bedding, as well as plenty of room for canned and frozen food storage. This had been one of the primary perks for consideration when making final decisions on a house, although he would have to be extra careful about its use should he ever come under suspicion since unlike the basement of his Chandler Square home, the storm cellar is a known addition to the house's floor plans. He suspects he won't have much time for extracurriculars until Will is older and more independent anyways. In all likelihood, there will be little opportunity to introduce long pig into his son's diet until he nears adolescence, which may be for the best. He has not thoroughly researched the effects of a primarily human-rich diet on growing prepubescents.

Once decorating and improvements to the house are complete, they can finally move in. He has brought Will there many times throughout the process to familiarize him with the place that will be their new home for the foreseeable future, but this will be his first time seeing it with everything in place exactly as it should be. The only room which Will has not seen at all yet aside from the shed and storm shelter is his playroom.

Will's playroom is the second largest in the house and located directly across the hall from one which Hannibal has designated as his personal office. He has not bothered furnishing Will's room with a bed, knowing that he will personally never be able to sleep again in a room absent of his son's quiet steady breathing. Will seems quite content each night to fall asleep snuggled up with Daddy and Peanut—the stuffed beagle's name, he has recently ascertained—and Hannibal sees no reason to disrupt this now familiar evening routine.

He has also taken Will into toy stores a few times recently, allowing him one or two small items to bring home after each trip, while studying which displays he appears to gravitate toward most in general and using these observations to inform the décor for this room.

The child squeals and rushes into the room as soon as Hannibal has opened the door. He dives first onto the giant stuffed dalmatian placed beside the window seat, large enough to serve as plush seating for the boy for a few years to come, rubbing his face into its soft belly. He eventually grows bored enough of this cuddling to stand and explore the rest of the room. He bypasses the shelves lined with children's books, the toy box, and the little drawing desk, but glances interestedly at the rug with a town designed on it, a dollhouse and a few doll businesses like a restaurant and a fire station already set out with toy cars parked beside them and a train set snaked around it with wide enough space for a small boy to sit on the carpet between the tracks and the rug. Hannibal is gratified, however, to see that his feet carry him next to the child-sized house fit snugly into the far left corner of the room, large enough to take up almost a quarter of the whole space. He is most proud of this particular addition.

This is not one of those brightly colored, cookie cutter hollow plastic contraptions he has watched his little Will disappear into every time they enter a store which has one on display. It is stained and carved cherry wood and it was built right here in this room to his

specifications. There is no roof, to allow for easy supervision and space for an adult to easily climb in and out of as well, but it has attachments to allow for a bedsheet to be pulled taut over its triangular crenellations to turn it into an instant blanket fort if desired.

Will enters it through the lattice-windowed dutch door. Neither this nor the shuttered windows in front have any glass panes which could shatter, of course. Inside the little house, flush against the left wall, is a kitchenette with real cabinets under the countertop and a pretend sink, stove, and oven made of tin built into it. The fake foods, refrigerator, and shopping cart are the usual bright plastics, however, a concession to the limitations of time to build and what was available at the shops. On the opposite side of the little house is a round coffee table the perfect size for a child's tea set, also plastic for now until Will can be trusted with a porcelain set, surrounded by throw pillows to sit on in lieu of chairs.

Will peers up at him through the open ceiling and reaches an arm up, making a repeated grabbing motion with his hand.

"Do you want this, darling?" he asks, holding out the backpack of his other toys. The boy nods so Hannibal passes it to him, watching as he immediately plops it onto the carpet and unzips it to pull out some of his favorites—Peanut, the plastic dinosaur duo, and a jet plane with a propeller on its nose and no pilot. Will dumps the rest of the toys out into a pile and sifts through them until he finds the little plastic figure that is supposed to sit in the cockpit and carefully returns the pilot to his preferred seat. He places these favored four (five if one counts the pilot separately) onto the pillows surrounding the table, then scoops the remaining toys back into the bag and puts it in an out of the way corner of the house, still unzipped but no longer a scattered about mess.

His little one detests messes. Some days his playtime consists of simply organizing his toys in a neat orderly single file against the wall. Then he'll tut as if disappointed and intentionally smash them apart to create a pile of haphazard chaos, only to line them all up again in a different order. Hannibal has previously watched him spend upwards of an hour meticulously picking toys out of the lineup and switching them out to different spots, often making a few microscopic adjustments to their orientation and positioning as well, before finally appearing satisfied and choosing ones to focus on for more "active" play. Occasionally his organization methods follow clear themes of color or size coordination, but often they are fashioned in a pattern Hannibal doesn't quite understand. Today, however, he must be in a hurry to get to his envisioned scene and employs the practice of "out of sight, out of mind" for the toys he won't be using by putting them away altogether.

Often times, Will barely touches his toys at all, but he'll intently stare at them or other inanimate objects throughout the apartment, lips and hands twitching in a manner that denotes there is certainly some sort of carefully crafted design playing out in his head. Other times, like now, it soon becomes obvious that he's playing not just for himself but for his audience, physically acting out a miniature performance for his daddy. He wants to be watched, or perhaps even joined. As always, Hannibal waits for a clear signal to indicate the latter rather than assuming.

The signal comes when Will finishes arranging the toys around the tea table in the order he wants them and looks up again at Hannibal expectantly. Hannibal smiles and gingerly steps

over the wall to join him inside. There are still boxes in the car to be unpacked, but those can wait. He would be a fool to pass up any opportunity given to play with Will over remaining a mere onlooker. Constructor sets such as Legos and simple wooden blocks are next on his shopping list, in fact, not only because it's apparent that Will would enjoy the act of building, but because they are the simplest way he can encourage an active role more often by building with them by himself and coaxing Will into joining him instead of always waiting for these rarefied invitations.

Will takes him by the hand and guides him to one of the remaining pillows. Hannibal sits cross-legged facing him, but Will clicks his tongue and looks sternly at him until Hannibal takes the hint and adjusts how he is seated to face the table instead. Only then does Will step closer to delicately pick up the teapot at the center of the table with both hands. Perhaps he is due a finer set made of porcelain sooner than expected.

Will vocalizes more when he is in a particularly energetic mood. Now, as he pretends to fill the pot with water at the sink behind Hannibal and clinks a spoon around to make "tea," he loudly hums and verbalizes little nonsense words like "bong" and "ding" in a disjointed rhythm. Hannibal closes his eyes against a deepening swell of love as he recognizes that Will is making music in mimicry of the songs which play on their stereo when Hannibal prepares their meals. He wishes he had a tape recorder now and resolves to carry one around the house from now on in hopes of capturing another magical moment like this.

As he listens, Will's sweet, childish high voice singing a capella layers itself over memories of professional stringed and wind instruments piping softly from high fidelity speakers as he tells his beloved to "slice the ginger" and plates their meal afterwards, the first they shared together with no other guests at Hannibal's table and in full knowledge of each other's darkness, when he had felt so hopeful and hopelessly in love, though he didn't fully acknowledge this feeling for what it was yet.

He smiles and fights back the desire to cry just as earnestly, knowing the Will of now to be too young to understand the sacred joy of the bittersweet and not wanting to spoil this moment's happiness in deference to another. His son deserves the entirety of his devotion now, not a memory of a moment that will never be.

They will make new memories together, he and Will, memories which they both can share in the many years to come.

Chapter End Notes

Not me modeling some of child Will's atypical behavior and mannerisms off myself as a kid 😅

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